



Edward Steichen (American, born Luxembourg, 1879–1973)

## Rodin, Le Penseur

1902

Gum bichromate print

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

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**AIC accession number:** 1949.825

**Stieglitz Estate number:**

**Inscriptions:** Inscribed recto, lower left, in white pencil: "Steichen / MDCCCCII"; inscribed verso, on mount, upper right, sideways, in graphite: "[ROD]IN" "LE PENSEUR / BY / STEICHEN"; verso, on mount, center, sideways, in graphite: "[?]roden [?/crossed out]"; verso, on mount, upper left, diagonally, in graphite: "1/4 101 Brush / Aluminum Brz [?] tone / oak b[illegible] 131 / color / 3/8 101 Brush Aluminum Brz / tone"; verso, on mount, upper left, in graphite: "[drawing]"; verso, on mount, lower left, sideways, in graphite: "[drawing of matting instructions]"; verso, on mount, lower left, sideways, in graphite: "Steichen / if A as diag / Sr 10 1/4 x 12 3/4"

**Dimensions:** 26.2 x 32.6 cm (image/paper/mount)

**Print thickness:** N/A

**Surface sheen:** Medium gloss (10.7 GU @ 85°)

**Paper tone:** N/A

**Mount:** Original

**Mount tone:** N/A

**Ultraviolet-induced (UV) visible fluorescence (recto):** None

**X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:**

See below

**Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometry:**  
N/A

## CONTEXT

Upon moving to Paris to pursue an artistic career, Steichen befriended Auguste Rodin. Created from two negatives, this print shows the sculptor with two of his works. Steichen combined an image of the silhouetted Rodin in front of his *Monument to Victor Hugo* with another, separate exposure of *Le Penseur (The Thinker)*. This print depicts *Monument to Victor Hugo* in reverse, but it seems Steichen preferred this composition despite the fact that it was not true to Rodin's sculpture.

The many graphite inscriptions on the mount verso are nearly invisible under regular light. Infrared photography reveals notations relating to the work's exhibition history ("Dresden") and framing decisions.

Alfred Stieglitz twice reproduced this photograph in *Camera Work*, once in 1905 and again in 1906, in a "Steichen Supplement" featuring 16 photogravures of Steichen's works.

## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This photograph is a gum bichromate print on a thin paper. The print is mounted overall to a thick board with a dark facing paper. The verso of the mount has many graphite inscriptions, most seeming to pertain to framing. Because of the dark color of the mount, these inscriptions are only visible in specular light and were imaged with infrared photography to increase their legibility. At the bottom left corner of the print, Steichen signed his name in block letters and dated the work in roman numerals. Steichen typically dated his prints according to the year they were printed, rather than the negative date. It is therefore not unusual to have the date on the print conflict with other dated prints from the same negative. When the surface of the print is examined under high magnification, the fibers from the paper are visible and the pigmented gum arabic sits directly on the surface of the paper. Some heavy retouching and modifications by the artist are noticeable around both figures and in the area between them. Steichen created this image by combining two separate negatives, though it is unclear whether this print was made from two negatives or from a copy negative created using a combination print. The mottled background of the print demonstrates that this method of printing does not allow easy gradations of light and shadow. The print does not fluoresce when exposed to long-wave UV radiation. Chromium and lead were detected using XRF spectrometry. Chromium is used to sensitize the gum bichromate. While lead is less commonly used in gum bichromate printing, the resulting signal is likely from a component of the pigment used in the gelatin layer.

**X-RAY FLUORESCENCE (XRF) SPECTROMETRY**

XRF spectral readings were taken from the recto of the work and from the mount when available. The elements listed below have been positively identified in the work; elements in bold have been attributed to the processing of the print.

Print: **Cr, Pb**

Mount: Ca, Mn, Fe, Cu, Zn

The graph below shows XRF spectra for three distinct measurement areas on the print: the darkest, maximum-density image area (Dmax, purple); the lightest, minimum-density image area (Dmin, green); and the mount, when available (orange). The background spectrum (gray) represents the characteristic contribution of the instrument itself as measured on a Teflon reference and is included in order to discount irrelevant elements from the print's signature. Elements were identified based on the presence of their characteristic peaks. Analysis was performed with a Bruker/Keymaster Tracer III-V+ energy-dispersive handheld XRF analyzer, equipped with changeable Ti and Al filters and a Rh transmission target. Measurements were taken for 120 or 180 LT at 40 kV and 10  $\mu$ A. The spectrum below illustrates the significant peaks for this print in the energy range from 3 to 11 keV.

Figure 1. (right)  
Locations of XRF measurements

Figure 2. (below)  
XRF spectra from the Dmax, Dmin, mount,  
and background signal produced by the  
analyzer.

